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E.O. 12065: RDS-1,4 5/29/00 (FRANCIS DE TARR) OR-P
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, FR, IR
SUBJ: (S) IRAN HOSTAGES: FOLLOWUP TO SAUNDERS VISIT

1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. IN A MEETING LATE AFTERNOON MAY 29 FOREIGN
MINISTRY DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, HENRI
SERVANT, READ TO US FROM A CABLE RECEIVED THE PREVIOUS
EVENING FROM THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN TEHRAN WHICH
WAS IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS POSED TO HIM FOLLOWING
ASST. SECY. SAUNDERS TALKS IN PARIS. IN COMMENTING
ON THE TELEGRAM SERVANT SAID THAT HE WAS A BIT DIS-
APPOINTED BY IT; WHILE A SINCERE ANALYSIS OF THE
SITUATION IT DID NOT POINT THE WAY TOWARDS MEANS OF
RESOLVING THE HOSTAGE ISSUE AND WAS THEREFORE NOT AS
RESPONSIVE AS HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO SAUNDERS
REQUEST. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ARE FROM DETAILED
NOTES TAKEN DURING SERVANT'S READING OF THE TELEGRAM
AND WHILE LESS THAN VERBATIM REPRESENT A CLOSE
APPROXIMATION OF IT.

3. THE QUESTION OF THE HOSTAGES REMAINS AT THE
CENTER OF ALL DEBATES IN IRAN, BOTH INTERNAL AND
SECRET

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EXTERNAL. AT BELGRADE, AT ISLAMABAD AND ON OTHER OCCASIONS THE IRANIANS HAVE BEEN URGED TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM. CONTACTS ON THE QUESTION IN IRAN CONTINUE, IN SUCH WAYS AS THE VISIT OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS AND DAQUDI.

4. THE UTILITY OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY NOW IS QUESTIONABLE. KHOMEINI'S PROHIBITION ON INITIATIVES RELATING TO IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH THE US HAS BEEN INHIBITING. BANI SADR, GHOTBZADEH AND TABATABAI ARE WELL-DISPOSED TO A SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEM BUT THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO BE EFFECTIVE. THE INTERLOCUTORS WHO COULD BE DECISIVE REMAIN INFLEXIBLE.

5. THE CURRENT CONTEXT IS MARKED BY THE SICKNESS OF THE IMAM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER, A SITUATION WHICH DOES NOT FAVOR DIRECT CONTACT WITH IRANIAN AUTHORITIES. CERTAINLY THE NON-ALIGNED IN GENERAL AND CERTAIN PROGRESSIVE STATES SUCH AS LIBYA, SYRIA, ALGERIA AND THE PALESTINIANS STILL HAVE SOME INFLUENCE BUT, THAT SAID, ONE SHOULD NOT HAVE TOO MANY ILLUSIONS. THE HOSTAGE ISSUE REVOLVES AROUND THE QUESTION OF THE POWER STRUGGLE AND NOT AROUND THIS OR THAT SCENARIO DEVELOPED BY VARIOUS INTERMEDIARIES.

6. DIALOGUE WITH KHOMEINY OR WITH THE MILITANT STUDENTS IS PRACTICALLY USELESS AS THEY CANNOT CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDE. DIALOGUE WITH BANI SADR OR GHOTBZADEH WILL GIVE NO SURPRISES AS THEIR POSITIONS ARE WELL KNOWN AND ARE COMPLETELY TACTICAL. HABIBI IS HONEST AND SINCERE BUT HE IS WEAK AND DOES NOT REPRESENT A REAL POWER BASE. THAT IS THE REASON WHY HE MAY BE NAMED THE PRIME MINISTER; HE COULD BE BOTH

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THE MAN OF BANI SADR AND THE ISLAMIC CLERGY. (COMMENT: SERVANT ALSO SHARED WITH US A SHORT CABLE RECEIVED SUBSEQUENTLY WHICH DEALT WITH THE OPENING OF THE PARLIAMENT IN WHICH THE AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT HABIBI'S CHANCES FOR THE PRIME MINISTRY HAD FADED AS HE NOW FACED THE HOSTILITY OF THE CLERGY.)

7. IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES THERE ARE TWO BROAD GROUPS OF INTEREST, THE RELIGIOUS AND THE LAICS. THE RELIGIOUS REMAIN THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF POWER BUT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE THAT THEY WILL MODIFY THEIR ATTITUDES. AMONG THE RELIGIOUS THERE ARE THREE GROUPS; THE SHIITE HIERARCHY, THE FAMILY OF KHOMEINY, AND THE "PARTY OF PRIESTS". THE SHIITE HIERARCHY IS DOMINATED BY AYATOLLAH MONTAZERI, THE PRESUMED SUCCESSOR TO KHOMEINY. HE IS TRADITIONALIST, POPULIST AND ANTI-WESTERN. HE IS SURROUNDED BY TRADITIONALIST RELIGIOUS DIGNITARIES SUCH AS MECHJEUNI AND GALPAYIGANI. SEVERAL OF THESE DIGNITARIES HAVE SUFFICIENT AUTONOMY

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TO BE WORTHWHILE INTERLOCUTORS. THEY INCLUDE SHIRAZI OF MESHED, GALPAYIGANI OF QOM AND ALLEMEH NOURI OF TEHRAN. HOWEVER, THERE IS NO QUESTION OF LEADING THESE PEOPLE TO GO AGAINST KHOMEINY AND HIS ENTOURAGE ON ANY QUESTION RELATING TO THE UNITED STATES. THREE OTHER AYATOLLAHS ARE RELATIVELY OPEN-MINDED AND HAVE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER TAKEN SIDES WITH BANI SADR. THEY ARE: SHIRAZI OF QOM, TEHERI OF ISFAHAN AND TEHERANI OF MESHED.

8. THE SECOND RELIGIOUS GROUPING, THE FAMILY OF THE IMAM, HAS SEEN ITS POWER GROW RECENTLY AS A RESULT OF THE SICKNESS OF THE IMAM. PARTICULARLY NOTEWORTHY IN THIS GROUP ARE AHMED KHOMEINY, THE SON OF THE IMAM, HIS BROTHER PASANDIDEH, WHO SUPPORTED BANI SAOR FOR THE PRESIDENCY, AND ESHRAGHE, THE SON-IN-LAW OF THE IMAM.

9. AS FOR THE THIRD GROUPING, THE PARTY OF THE PRIESTS, THEY ARE DOMINATED BY THE QUEST FOR POWER. THEY ARE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES IN THE COUNCIL OF THE REVOLUTION AND WILL PROBABLY BE ASSIGNED POSITIONS IN THE IMPORTANT "OVERSIGHT COUNCIL" (CONSEIL DE SURVEILLANCE). THE FOUR MOST POWERFUL IN THIS GROUP ARE: BEHESHTI, ARDEBILE, RAFSANJANI AND KHOMENI.

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10. AS FOR THE SECOND MAJOR GROUPING, THE LAICS, IT IS SURPRISING THAT THE AMERICANS MENTION SANDJABI. SANDJABI THE FATHER HAS BEEN USED UP AND DISCREDITED AND HAS PLAYED NO ROLE SINCE HE LEFT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. HIS 26 YEAR OLD SON IS AN ADVISOR TO BANI SADR ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. HE IS WELL DISPOSED TO RESOLUTION OF THE HOSTAGE AFFAIR BUT HE ONLY HAS POWER WITHIN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PRESIDENCY.

11. AMONG THE LAICS BAZARGAN HAS NOT BEEN ELIMINATED FROM AUTHORITY. HE IS ON THE COUNCIL OF THE REVOLUTION AND THOUGH HE SPEAKS LESS, HE CAN STILL PLAY A ROLE. WITHIN HIS GROUPING IS SAHABI, THE DIRECTOR OF PLANS AND BUDGET. HE IS A MODERATE OF US TRAINING WHO WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION AS THE INTERIM PRIME MINISTER. WHATEVER POWER THESE PEOPLE HAVE, IT IS LIMITED IN THE HOSTAGE AFFAIR.

12. ANOTHER AND MUCH MORE INTERESTING GROUPING AMONG THE LAICS IS THE "GROUP MUSA SADR". IT INCLUDES TABATABAI, SHAMRANI, YAZDI AND GHOTBZADEH. THEY HAVE TIES WITH THE RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY. TABATABAI IS LINKED WITH MUSA SADR OF LEBANON AND THE FAMILY OF KHOMEINY. THEY ARE ALL CONVINCED MUSLIMS. RESERVED IN REGARD TO BANI SADR, THEY ARE HOSTILE TO A CLERICAL APPROACH TO GOVERNING WHICH SEEMS TO THEM BOUND TO FAIL AND THEY ARE ATTEMPTING TO PERSUADE THE HIERARCHY TO CHANGE ITS POLICY AND ENTRUST THE GOVERNMENT TO THEMSELVES. THEY ARE ALSO ATTEMPTING TO PERSUADE THE ISLAMIC PARTY TO SOFTEN ITS POSITION. OPPOSED TO THE HOLDING OF THE HOSTAGES, THEY HOPE TO REACH A COMPROMISE ON THIS POINT WITH THE HIERARCHY. THEY.

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HAVE ADOPTED THE "MCBRIDE PLAN" BUT DO NOT EXCLUDE THE IDEA OF THE TRIAL OF THE HOSTAGES.

13. ON THE SUBJECT OF ARGUMENTS TO BE USED WITH IRANIAN AUTHORITIES, THERE IS BASICALLY NO ARGUMENT WHICH HAS NOT BEEN USED A NUMBER OF TIMES AT VARIOUS LEVELS. ESSENTIALLY THERE IS BUT ONE ARGUMENT WHICH COUNTS: THAT THE HOSTAGE AFFAIR IS BAD FOR THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION AND THAT IT HAS BEEN ENGAGED ON BAD TERRAIN AND UNDER BAD CIRCUMSTANCES. THE ARGUMENT OF THE SOVIET THREAT REACHES A NUMBER OF THE AUTHORITIES -- ALL OF WHOM ARE ANTI-SOVIET -- BUT THE RUSSIANS ARE TAKING CARE TO DO NOTHING THAT WOULD FAVOR A RAPPROCHMENT WITH THE US. FOR THE MAJORITY OF IRANIANS THE SOVIET DANGER IS NOT IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO TURN ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE US PROBLEM.

14. THE MEETING OF PARLIAMENT IS AN ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENT. THE DEPUTIES WILL NOT FIND THE SOLUTION BUT AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF POSTURING THE MASKS WILL DROP AND THE DEPUTIES WILL DISCLOSE THEIR REAL POSITIONS. THE INTENSE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY OF THE PAST DAYS IS ALSO CERTAINLY A POSITIVE ELEMENT EVEN IF IT ALL STARTED A BIT TOO SOON AS THERE IS A DEGREE OF COMPETITION AMONG THE VARIOUS SCENARIOS. FOR HIS PART GHOTBZADEH PUSHES DAUDI WHO WANTS TO GET THE

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WALDHEIM COMMISSION BACK TO WORK. DAQUDI IS STUDYING WAYS OF PUBLISHING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE A REPORT ON THE CRIMES OF THE SHAH IN ORDER TO GET THE PROCESS MOVING AGAIN WITH MINIMUM DELAY. FOR THE MOMENT THE DAQUDI MISSION HAS AROUSED NO OPPOSITION IN IRAN -- BUT HE HAS LIMITED HIS EFFORTS TO THE CRIMES OF THE SHAH WITHOUT SPEAKING ABOUT THE HOSTAGE AFFAIR.

15. CONCERNING A REPORT TO THE PARLIAMENT ON THE HOSTAGE AFFAIR, ONE CAN SEE ITS OUTLINE BECAUSE THE SCENARIOS HAVE A COMMON POINT; ALL LINK RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES TO CONDEMNATION OF THE US. THERE ARE THREE POSSIBLE OPTIONS. A) A "HARD" SCENARIO INVOLVING TRIAL OF THE HOSTAGES. THAT IS THE SCENARIO OF BEHESHTI AND THE MILITANT STUDENTS. B) THE "MCBRIDE" SCENARIO WHICH INVOLVES TRIAL OF THE US BY AN INTERNATIONAL JURY. THIS IS THE SCENARIO OF YAZDI, SHAMRAN, AND NO DOUBT OF BANI SADR HIMSELF. C) THE MOST CONCILIATORY SCENARIO IS THAT OF GHOTBZADEH WHICH FAVORS THE WALDHEIM COMMISSION.

16. TWO POINTS OF FRICTION ARE EVIDENT: A) THE UNROLLING OF THE SCENARIO AND THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES AND B) THE QUESTION OF TRIAL AND EVENTUAL CONDEMNATION OF THE US. (COMMENT: QUESTIONED AS TO

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WHAT THIS MEANT SERVANT SAID THAT HE WAS NOT SURE. ON THIS AND A NUMBER OF OTHER POINTS HE FOUND THE TELEGRAM BADLY CRAFTED AND IMPRECISE.) THE SUCCESS OF VARIOUS SCENARIOS DEPENDS ON TWO SERIES OF FACTORS WHICH GO BEYOND THE QUESTION OF THE HOSTAGES. THE FIRST SERIES INCLUDES THE ATTITUDE OF THE IMAM AND THE MILITANT STUDENTS. ALSO, PART OF THE RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY IS EMOTIONAL AND MORALISTIC. ONLY GHOTBZADEH HAS BET ON A RETURN OF LOGIC AND COMMON SENSE. A LESS OPTIMISTIC VIEW WAS THAT EXPRESSED BY ARAFAT SOME TIME AGO WHO, WHEN LEAVING KHOMEINY, SAID THAT HE WILL NEVER GO AGAINST THE STUDENTS BECAUSE THEY ARE A PART OF HIMSELF. THE SECOND SERIES OF FACTORS CONCERNS THE LOGIC OF THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER. THIS COMPLICATES THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES BECAUSE INFLEXIBILITY ON THIS ISSUE IS ONE OF THE WAYS THE CLERGY HAS OF DESTROYING THE APPROVAL GIVEN TO BANI SAOR AT THE TIME OF HIS ELECTION AS PRESIDENT AND OF CONSOLIDATING THEIR OWN POWER. IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THE RELIGIOUS CONSIDER THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO MODERATE THEIR POSITION. BANI SAOR HAS BEEN WEAKENED BUT HE PERSISTS. AFTER MONTHS OF HARASSMENT OF BANI SAOR THE RELIGIOUS CAN CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE STRATEGY OF TENSION WHICH HAS UP TO NOW BEEN A SUCCESS FOR THEM.

CHAPMAN

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